

## Councillor Frontline Visits Form

<b>Name of Councillor</b>	Ben Wye
<b>Date of visit</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> July 2025
<b>Team visited</b>	Children and Families Court Team

*A personal note: Thank you and the court team for your time, welcome, candour and commitment to our children and young people. I felt quite emotional at times at the genuine desire to improve outcomes. You do excellent work under significant challenges and stresses.*

<b>Quality of practice</b>
<p><b>Strengths:</b></p> <p>Since inception in February 2025 the Court Team has enabled dedicated Social Workers to work with children without the interruption that mandatory and short notice court appearance necessitated.</p> <p>Team members are developing specialist expertise and practice in court work that has resulted in increased compliance reflected in the reduction of costly C2 extensions (is there a record of these costs to help reflect on other approaches to preparing for them?).</p> <p>There was a feeling that small, early interventions could be more effective and allow a child to stay with their family and avoid costly and traumatic court work and decisions to remove a child. A simple example was to use a worker as a proxy grandparent through difficult times e.g. pick a child up from school, help the parent cook tea and tidy up. It was felt that the Families First Partnership <a href="#">legislation</a> would enable this more flexible and creative response. It would be interesting to hear how that is affecting actual practice now to be more efficient.</p> <p>All four workers in the forum found AI help in report writing reduced workload and improved formats.</p>
<p><b>Areas for development:</b></p> <p>Everyone was convinced of the need to reduce the number of children presenting, but the court team necessarily picks up from other teams who may still be working on recording etc. While there is great respect for colleagues work there was a frustration that different teams were not streamlined. One solution could be to have greater clarity about respective roles and responsibilities (I could find nothing online about</p>

the Court Team work). Sometimes a child was not presented to the Court Team for a month into the 26 week window due to lack of records. There was a feeling that if they could start earlier, they would not incur the cost of C2.

### Experience of working for Cheshire East Council

#### Strengths:

Every worker I met is committed to improving children's outcomes and wanted a more streamlined process. The lure of agency work was clearly a pull factor, not only because of the pay difference but it was felt that some agency workers did not feel the same commitment as permanent staff.

The pressures of time and workload was a strong theme, reflected in the fact that workers had to leave to deal with issues during the visit. The arrival of a senior head of overall service, who can coordinate and streamline the different teams was very much welcomed.

#### Areas for development:

Half of the team, including the team leader, work for agencies rather than being a permanent staff member, some for many years. While this does bring in outside experience and good practice churn is a real issue. Half the team have left since it started in February. The anxiety of protection work, with strict deadlines means that some work almost double the 37 hours, often waking at night thinking about a child.

*"In adult care you can turn your laptop off at 5pm confident that no one is likely to die from your decision that day. In child protection that is always on my mind".*

It was felt by some that to retain good permanent staff and reduce stress we should invest in clinical supervision and consider narrowing the pay gap with agency staff which would save money in the longer term.

A final, personal thought: Some placements are unavoidably far away; examples cited were rural Wales and East Anglia. This means expensive travel and time, sometimes overnight and the same burden on families to come here. Would it be possible for more local or independent social workers to cover this work, as we have half agency staff internally anyway. Perhaps on the Uber Model; putting caseloads on a shared platform for qualified independent or agency social workers to cover?

**Issues to be escalated to Head of Service**

*Please provide any areas where you require a response from the Head of Service*  
Whilst I do not 'require' a response it would be helpful to get feedback and comments.

*Please send this completed form within one week of the visit to [childrensdevelopmentandpartnerships@cheshireeast.gov.uk](mailto:childrensdevelopmentandpartnerships@cheshireeast.gov.uk)*